



Online Ethics Center
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Adventures in Collaborative Research (Abridged)

Author(s)

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Description

Three-page, script-style case. Social science (oral history) and interdisciplinary research. Issues include authorship, mentoring, collaborative research, miscommunication, and human subjects research.

Body

Speakers: **Narrator; Pat**, a graduate student in journalism; **Professor Utley**, Professor of Education and Director of the University Center on Race Relations (UCRR); **Professor Jefferson**, Associate Professor of Anthropology and Fellow of the UCRR.

Scene 1

NARRATOR: **Professor Jefferson** is an anthropologist leading an interdisciplinary team of five graduate students who are studying race relations in a small rural town. The project is funded by the Federal Government and the **University Center on**

Race Relations (UCRR). A history student (**Chris**) has been taking notes on public documents; three students – one in journalism (**Pat**), one in anthropology, and one in education – have been conducting interviews; and a student in cultural geography has been studying the buildings and making maps. Their subject matter is especially interesting because it is one of the few towns of its size in the state to have had Americans of European and African descent living side-by-side for over one hundred and fifty years.

The setting is the office of Professor Utley, the director of the University Center on Race Relations. The UCRR is coordinating and funding a large number of projects on race relations in several states. Utley considers Jefferson a rising star and Jefferson's project and team very promising. Pat has made an appointment with Utley to discuss some concerns.

UTLEY: Sit down, Pat. Why did you want to speak with me?

PAT: A couple of weeks ago, some of us – Professor Jefferson, me, and a couple of other students – attended the national meeting of the American Association for the Study of Race. Jefferson presented a paper based on the team's work, but I wasn't able to attend because I was responding to another paper in another session. Afterward one of the students, Chris, who did attend Jefferson's presentation, told me about it.

UTLEY: Yes?

PAT: Well, Chris told me that Jefferson quoted one of the people I interviewed, Sadie Jones, and remarked on how eloquent Sadie is. But that's not the Sadie Jones I interviewed.

UTLEY: Pardon me?

PAT: In my interview with her, Sadie had next to nothing to say. All she did was quote Scripture. Chris said that Sadie's amazing description of the lynching was key to Jefferson's paper. The only thing Sadie said to me about the lynching was that it was God's will.

UTLEY: Tell me more about this lynching.

PAT: It's a really interesting incident because there are so many different versions of what happened. Chris – the historian on the project? – Chris has found documents

that show pretty clearly that before the lynching, the blacks kept to their part of town and the whites to theirs. There weren't many interactions between the groups, but there were clearly some tensions. Then some white men lynched a black man named Tom Harris. And the amazing thing is that within a few months of the lynching, black people were living in the white part of town and the animosity seems to have died down for several years.

UTLEY: That's really strange. You'd expect a lynching to further divide the community, not integrate it.

PAT: We'll probably never know why it happened. The documents Chris has found don't shed much light on the matter, and the people old enough to remember it, or to remember stories about it, all put a different spin on it.

UTLEY: So have you talked to Professor Jefferson about your concerns?

PAT: I haven't had a chance. You know those anthropologists; always flying off to do fieldwork somewhere. Jefferson has mostly been out of town since the AASR meeting. I haven't even been able to get my hands on the paper to see what it actually says.

UTLEY: You'd better talk to Jefferson the first chance you get.

PAT: [Upset] This really has me concerned. Jefferson listed me as a co-author on the paper, and I'll be listed as one of the co-authors on the book. I don't want any publication with my name on it filled with dressed-up quotations.

UTLEY: [Soothingly] Don't get all worked up. The book isn't going to be published any time soon; you have plenty of time to deal with it. Just relax. [Checks the time] I've got a meeting to get to.

Scene 2

NARRATOR: A few days later. Professor Jefferson is in Professor Utle's office at the Center. Utle has just finished giving Jefferson an accurate description of Utle's discussion with Pat.

JEFFERSON: [Amused] What a tangled web!

UTLEY: I'm glad you're taking it that way. If I weren't directing this Center and responsible for the projects done under its auspices, I would have let the whole thing drop. But what I've heard from Pat concerned me, and I wanted to get the straight story.

JEFFERSON: Well, Pat is both right and wrong. In Pat's interview, Sadie didn't say much about the lynching. But I did a follow-up telephone interview and got some better material.

UTLEY: Does Pat know about that interview?

JEFFERSON: No, we haven't had a meeting of the working group since I did it.

UTLEY: Why did you follow up with Sadie Jones? From what Pat says, she's just a font of Scriptural quotations.

JEFFERSON: [Smiles broadly] Some of the people other students interviewed hinted that Sadie had a unique perspective on the lynching. It was a hunch that paid off.

UTLEY: Why were you successful when Pat wasn't?

JEFFERSON: [Hesitant] Well, I was going to talk to you about this, and I'm afraid that now it will look self-serving.

UTLEY: Don't worry; just tell me.

JEFFERSON: Well, Pat really isn't a very good interviewer.

UTLEY: That's odd for a journalism student.

JEFFERSON: [Shrugs] Nevertheless, the transcripts from Pat's interviews are all quite shallow. I was going to suggest that we not re-hire Pat next semester.

UTLEY: It's your project; you have discretion over who works with you. By the way, do you have a transcript of your interview with Sadie Jones?

JEFFERSON: [Looking sheepish] As a matter of fact, I don't. I took notes during and after the conversation, so I'm confident that the quotations are good. But you know what – my tape recorder wasn't working. I didn't get any of it on tape.

UTLEY: [Chuckles sympathetically] The nightmare of every interviewer. I assume you've gotten it fixed.

JEFFERSON: It was a really easy fix. All I had to do was turn off the pause button.

Notes

This publication can be found at <http://www.teachrcr.us/home/resources/rcr-instruction/>.

This abridgement is adapted from a case prepared for use at a workshop at the University of Minnesota, February 1999. All characters, organizations, and situations in this case are fictional. The structure of the case was inspired by "The Whole Truth," a videotape in the Integrity in Scientific Research series produced and distributed by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. For more on the video series, see <https://www.aas.org/page/integrity-scientific-research-video-series> (verified Apr 29 2017).

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